



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Alan Wenzel...

And I'm Lynn Fisher...

In this week's episode, Stockton receives a state grant for a 180-acre industrial park...

A World Series MVP is coming to Freeport...

And the Freeport Park District invites local youth for a fun Crafternoon adventure.

This is Freepod for August 13th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

STOCKTON RECEIVES STATE GRANT FOR 180-ACRE INDUSTRIAL PARK

The Village of Stockton is getting state help to lay the groundwork for a major new industrial development.

Stockton has been awarded nearly 91-thousand dollars through Illinois' Regional Site Readiness Program. The money will fund a site concept plan and assessment for a proposed 180-acre industrial site.



Northwest Illinois Economic Development says the award follows roughly two years of work with Jo Daviess County, and about a year spent developing the grant application with Stockton and Community Funding and Planning. Origin Design and Conlon Construction also provided technical assistance.

The grant is intended for planning rather than construction. Illinois officials say site-readiness planning can include engineering, environmental studies and other assessments needed to make properties more attractive to companies considering new facilities.

For Stockton, the goal is to turn the 180-acre property into a competitive location for future industrial investment and potentially new jobs.

The Stockton award is part of 35-million dollars in new site-readiness funding announced for 22 locations across Illinois.



OGLE COUNTY PHASING OUT EMERGENCY SIRENS

Ogle County is preparing for a major change in how residents are warned about severe weather and other emergencies.

About 59 outdoor warning sirens owned and maintained by Constellation Energy are expected to be phased out in the coming years. The sirens were installed as part of emergency planning surrounding the Byron Nuclear Generating Station but have also been used by the county for tornadoes and other emergencies.

Ogle County Sheriff Brian VanVickle says the transition will not happen overnight. The existing sirens will remain operational until a replacement notification system receives approval from the state and FEMA — a process that could take a year or longer.

The county expects to rely increasingly on alerts sent directly to cell phones, along with television, radio and social media.

Some sirens could remain in locations where cellular coverage is poor. However, communities choosing to keep them would become responsible for maintenance and activation costs.

County officials are reminding residents that outdoor sirens were never intended to be the only source of emergency information and encourage people to have multiple ways of receiving warnings.

JO DAVIESS COUNTY WATER TESTING INDICATES ELEVATED PFAS LEVELS



Elevated levels of so-called “forever chemicals” have been detected in a Jo Daviess County drinking water system.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency says testing of the Mount Vernon Association Community Water System found two PFAS chemicals above state groundwater standards.



Testing detected PFOA at four-point-nine parts per trillion and PFOS at five-point-five parts per trillion. Illinois’ groundwater standard for each is four parts per trillion.

PFAS are a group of long-lasting, human-made chemicals once widely used in products including non-stick cookware, waterproof clothing and firefighting foam.

The Illinois EPA says long-term PFAS exposure has been associated with several potential health effects, although exposure does not mean someone will develop health problems.

Residents served by the system are being notified, while nearby private well owners are encouraged to consider PFAS testing.

Officials say boiling water does NOT remove PFAS. Certain activated-carbon and reverse-osmosis filters can reduce the chemicals.

The new federal drinking-water limits become enforceable in 2029.



CARROLL COUNTY SHERIFF LOOKING FOR HELP IN IDENTIFYING VEHICLE BURGLARS

The Carroll County Sheriff's Office is asking for the public's help identifying two people believed to be connected to a series of vehicle burglaries in Shannon.

Authorities say multiple vehicles were burglarized during the early morning hours, and investigators have released images of two individuals they believe may have been involved.

The Sheriff's Office is asking anyone who recognizes the individuals, or who may have surveillance or doorbell camera footage that could help investigators, to come forward.

Residents are also being reminded to lock their vehicles and avoid leaving valuables inside, particularly where they can be seen.

Anyone with information can contact Carroll County Crime Stoppers at 815-244-STOP — that's 815-244-7867.

The investigation remains ongoing.

ANYTIME FITNESS ANNOUNCES ITS CLOSING

A longtime Freeport fitness center is preparing to close its doors for good.

Anytime Fitness of Freeport announced that its location at 1862 South West Avenue will permanently close after serving the community for more than a decade.

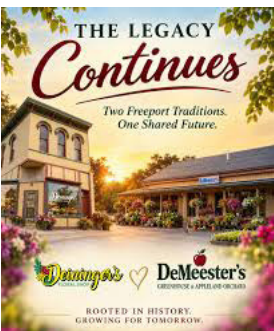
Customers were notified of the decision by email, and the gym later posted a farewell message thanking Freeport residents for their years of loyalty and support.



An exact closing date has not been announced, but members have been encouraged to begin looking for another location.

Anytime Fitness operates thousands of independently owned gyms around the world. The company's location directory lists other clubs in the region, including locations in Winnebago and Durand.

The Freeport gym has not publicly provided a reason for the closure.



DEMEESTER'S ANNOUNCES NEW OWNERSHIP

A longtime Freeport business will remain open after a change in ownership.

DeMeester's Greenhouse and Appleland Orchard has been purchased by Brian Stewart, who earlier this year also acquired Deiningers Floral Shop in downtown Freeport.

The DeMeester family operated the Baileyville Road business for 94 years, spanning four

generations. Mike and Kathy DeMeester announced in June they were stepping away, citing health and family considerations.

Under the new ownership, Stewart says DeMeester's will retain its familiar offerings, including annuals, perennials, houseplants, landscaping supplies, mums, pumpkins and apples. The popular apple cider donuts will also remain.

The business is already open and preparing for the fall season, with more details about seasonal activities and family events expected soon.

DeMeester's is located at 1706 South Baileyville Road in Freeport.

MERCYHEALTH TO GIVE AWAY DIAPERS

Freeport-area families with infants and toddlers can pick up free baby supplies during a community giveaway next month.

Mercyhealth, Molina Healthcare and the Stephenson County Health Department are teaming up for a drive-through diaper giveaway on Thursday, September 10th.

The event runs from 9:30 until 11 a.m. at Mercyhealth Burchard Hills, located at 1010 West Fairway Drive in Freeport.

Families can receive diapers or pull-ups, along with baby wipes, soap and lotion while supplies last.

The Stephenson County Health Department will also offer free car seat safety checks during the event.

No advance registration is required.

Organizers say the giveaway is made possible in part through contributions from Freeport-area donors to the Mercyhealth Foundation.

Again, the free drive-through event is Thursday, September 10th, beginning at 9:30 a.m.



VIRGINIA AMES NAMED HCC FOUNDATION LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT WINNER

A longtime supporter of Highland Community College is being recognized for more than four decades of service to the school and its students.

The Highland Community College Foundation has named Virginia Ames the recipient of its 2026 Delbert Scheider Lifetime Achievement Award. Ames established her first Highland scholarship in 1984 and has since created multiple endowed scholarships supporting students in fields ranging from cosmetology to computer science.

Since 2010 alone, more than 75 Highland students have received scholarships made possible through her support.

Ames also served for many years on the Highland Community College Foundation Board of Directors and now

holds emeritus status.

The award is named for longtime Highland trustee and Foundation leader Delbert Scheider.

Ames will receive the honor during the Foundation's annual Soirée on Saturday, August 22nd.

HCC RECOGNIZES ALL-ACADEMIC ATHLETES

The National Junior College Athletic Association has named 24 Highland athletes to its All-Academic Teams for the 2025-26 school year.

To qualify, student-athletes needed a grade-point average of at least three-point-six.

Five Highland athletes earned First Team honors with perfect four-point-oh GPAs: Brianna Gonnerman, Garrett Houston, Cailyn Lane, Taryn Mathews and Darryl Toney the Third.

Eight Highland athletes earned Second Team honors, while another eleven were named to the Third Team.

Highland also earned a national team honor. The Cougars' men's bowling program was named the NJCAA Men's Bowling Academic Team of the Year after posting a combined three-point-four-two GPA.

Nationwide, more than 13,700 student-athletes received NJCAA academic honors this year.



WORLD SERIES MVP COMING TO LITTLE CUBS FIELD

Chicago Cubs fans will have a chance to meet one of the heroes of the team's historic 2016 World Series championship when Ben Zobrist comes to Freeport next month.

Zobrist will appear at Little Cubs Field on Saturday, September 5th, from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. for a special fundraiser benefiting his non-profit organization, Champion Forward.

The former Cubs star was named Most Valuable Player of the 2016 World Series after driving in the go-ahead run in Game Seven. Zobrist was a three-time All-Star during his 14-year Major League career and also won a World Series with Kansas City in 2015.

The Freeport event will include a free home run derby, a youth baseball clinic, autographs, photos and a question-and-answer session. Zobrist will also sign copies of his new book, "Prepare for the Pressure," which was released in July.

And one fan could leave with a remarkable souvenir. Zobrist is bringing the 2017 Chevy Camaro convertible he received for being named World Series MVP, and fans can enter a sweepstakes to win the car.

Proceeds benefit Champion Forward, which works to promote healthier mental and emotional experiences for young athletes, parents and coaches.

Admission to Little Cubs Field at 1160 West Empire Street in Freeport is free.

OGLE COUNTY MAY TAKE CONTROL OF PART OF LORADO TAFT FIELD CAMPUS

Ogle County officials are exploring whether the county could take control of a portion of the historic Lorado Taft Field Campus near Oregon.



The property sits along the Rock River next to Lowden State Park and has been operated by Northern Illinois University for decades as an outdoor education center.

NIU announced plans in 2024 to close the campus, raising concerns about the future of the roughly 66-acre property and its historic buildings.

Now, Ogle County officials are considering whether the county could acquire part of the campus for public use, although discussions remain preliminary and no final agreement has been reached.

The property has a history stretching back more than a century. It was once home to the Eagle's Nest Art Colony, founded by sculptor Lorado Taft and other Chicago-area artists.

Any potential transfer would require additional negotiations and approval before Ogle County could assume control.



IL OFFERS TEMPORARY REDUCTION ON SALES TAX

Illinois families have just a few days left to save some money on back-to-school shopping.

The state's ten-day back-to-school sales tax holiday continues through Sunday, August 16th. During the holiday, Illinois' portion of the sales tax on qualifying purchases drops from six-point-two-five percent to one-point-two-five percent.

The reduced rate applies to school supplies such as notebooks, folders, pencils and other classroom necessities, with no price limit on those items.

Qualifying clothing and footwear are also included, as long as each individual item costs less than 125 dollars.

Keep in mind, however, that local sales taxes still apply, so shoppers won't necessarily see their total sales tax fall to one-point-two-five percent.

The tax holiday was included in Illinois' new state budget and is the first back-to-school sales tax holiday in the state since 2022.

The savings end Sunday.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION DENIED ACCESS TO ILLINOIS VOTER DATA

A federal judge has ruled Illinois does not have to turn over its complete, unredacted voter registration database to the Trump administration.

U.S. District Judge Colleen Lawless rejected the Justice Department's effort to



obtain information that includes voters' birth dates, driver's license numbers and partial Social Security numbers.

The Justice Department argued it needed the information to determine whether Illinois is complying with federal requirements to maintain accurate voter rolls. Illinois previously provided the federal government with a version of the database with sensitive information removed.

Lawless ruled the Civil Rights Act of 1960 does not give the Justice Department general authority to audit state election records and said the department failed to establish a sufficient basis and purpose for its demand.

Similar federal efforts to obtain unredacted voter information from other states have also been rejected by courts.



RAMP RIVER RUN

Runners, walkers and wheelchair participants will take to the streets of downtown Rockford Saturday for an annual event supporting people with disabilities.

RAMP's 13th annual River Run is set for August 15th and includes a half-marathon, 5K run and 3K Walk and Wheel-a-Thon.

The half-marathon begins at 7:30 a.m., followed by the 5K at 7:45 and the 3K at 8:35. Events begin near the City Market Pavilion in

downtown Rockford.

The courses follow portions of the Rock River, with the half-marathon extending north to the Sportscore area. Proceeds benefit RAMP, a regional nonprofit providing services and advocacy to help people with disabilities live independently.

Registration remains available through race day, with both competitive runners and families welcome to participate.

More information and registration are available at <https://815riverrun.com/>

HOPE WINS HOSTING A CAR WASH

Hope WINS is inviting the Freeport community to get their cars cleaned while helping support local families.

The nonprofit will hold a Car Wash Fundraiser Saturday, August 15th, from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. at Cub Foods in Freeport.

Money raised will help Hope WINS expand its Family Fun Day activities and R.I.S.E. Family Connection events. The Freeport-based organization provides programs including parent coaching, support groups, youth activities and family enrichment events.

Hope WINS is also looking for parents, teenagers and other



community members to volunteer during the car wash. Volunteers can participate for as little as an hour or two.

Anyone with questions or interested in helping can contact program director Janelle Nelson at 815-990-5928.



A DAY AT THE RACETRACK

Racing returns to the Stephenson County Fairgrounds this weekend, and this time there's a new addition to the track.

Backroad Raceway will hold its second race day of the season Sunday, August 16th, featuring ATV and side-by-side racing along with go-karts from Illinois Yard Karts.

The event follows the inaugural Backroad Raceway competition held at the fairgrounds in June.

Gates and the pits open at 11 a.m., with racing beginning at 2 at the ABC Supply Company Grandstands.

General admission is five dollars, pit admission is ten dollars, and racers can enter for 20 dollars per class. All transactions are cash only.

The Stephenson County Fairgrounds are located at 2250 South Walnut Road in Freeport.

Additional information is available through the Stephenson County Fair Association's Backroad Raceway page.

PARK DISTRICT HOSTS CRAFTERNOON & EXPLORE PROGRAM FOR YOUTH

Young nature lovers can explore how animals prepare for winter during an upcoming Freeport Park District program at Oakdale Nature Preserve Park.

The next "Crafternoon and Explore" program will be held Friday, August 28th, from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. at the Oakdale Shelter.

This month's program will teach children about the different ways wildlife survives the winter — including animals that sleep or hibernate, those that slow down their activity, and the ways animals find shelter and stay safe during the coldest months.

Kids will learn through hands-on exploration and also create a take-home craft.

The program is designed for young explorers ages five through twelve.

The cost is six dollars for Freeport Park District residents and eight dollars for non-residents.

Registration is required by August 21st.



Parents can register by calling 815-235-6114 or visiting https://webtrac.freeportparkdistrict.org/webtrac/web/search.html?Action=Start&SubAction=&_csrf_token=hl6C656R0F193Q4B1N3R2V4M724G5E4V055M-576J521G5M4P575C1J5O61516E6Z705P5R5204704O5E681U014O594V0A5E5U514D1F5Q616L4Z02664R-5F6I705O5Q54&primarycode=&keyword=crafternoon&keywordoption=Match+One&display=Detail&module=AR&multiselectlist_value=&arwebsearch_buttonsearch=yes&fbclid=IwY2xjawTlhd1wZG9mBWV4dG-4DYWVtAjEwAGJyaWQRMXg3YUpOdmYzVkRIYXBKUXFzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjlwMzIxNzg4MjAwODk-yAAEeOgWfnSHh9Eyt1BphYk7hvVNwPCywh3ppB1fcfzNWcufIrRnkDUSAwoCbsL0_aem_sR7-KA-kBorKYB4y-dAadA

IN CLOSING...

Before we go, a quick programming note. If you'd rather read the news than listen to it, we've got you covered. Every week, we post a complete written version of this newscast on our website at freepod.org. It's a great way to catch up on local news at your own pace or revisit a story you want to read in more detail.

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And it's not just our newscasts either. Our interviews are available to listen to anytime as well, including this past week's interview. Freepod news director Jim Yeager chatted with Amera Striegel, manager of the Stephenson County Farmer's Market. Amera shared some big changes that are happening with the market, including the acceptance of SNAP benefits as payment and how the purpose the market contributes to the overall health of the community.

We'd like to thank our community liaisons and reporters for providing pivotal content for our program, our partners at WNIJ in DeKalb for helping to share Freepod to a larger community, and the Media Studies department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

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This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.

